

Bilingual Identity among Youth in Minority Settings: A Complex Notion

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1. Introduction

The objective of this article is to attempt an examination of the way adolescents living in minority settings, through their discourse, represent themselves as members of a specific group - or groups, in terms of their cultural and linguistic identity. In other words, how do adolescents make sense of the notion of identity? Identity is understood as a social construction, where belonging to a particular linguistic and cultural group depends upon the dialectical social relations in which social actors are involved in society. Those social relations embody multiple facets - such as ethnicity, gender and social class - which influence one another constantly (Gérin-Lajoie, 2003). The adolescents' discourse on identity is conceived from representations resulting from their lived experiences and their life trajectory. In this context, language constitutes an essential component of the adolescents' lived experiences and in the making of their sense of identity.

My analysis is based on an ethnographic study that examined the cultural and linguistic self-representation of adolescents enrolled in two French language minority high schools in Ontario, an English-speaking majority province in Canada (in Ontario, there are four co-terminous publicly funded school systems distinguished by the language of instruction and/or religion - English secular, English Catholic; French secular, French Catholic. Access to the French language school system is generally limited to students of French speaking heritage). The study aimed to understand how these adolescents define themselves as members of a linguistic minority group, to examine their discourse on identity and to analyze the discourse that lead them to specific identity choices. The study sought to understand the way that these adolescents acquire a sense of belonging - *sens d'appartenance* - to a specific group, and how they perceive themselves in the identity representation process. The results revealed that most of the adolescents involved in my ethnographic study claim a bilingual identity. This is consistent with findings from prior large-scale quantitative studies. However, contrary to the interpretation of these quantitative studies that tends to explain bilingual identity as the road leading to assimilation, I will argue that it is not automatically the case and that the concept of bilingual identity is much more complex than the way it has been previously explained. To illustrate my point, I will draw from my ethnographic study to examine closely the case of two adolescents - Annie and Pierre, who both claim a bilingual identity, but whose discourses differ greatly in regard to their *rapport* to the subordinate language - French, and to identity in general. The contrasting views expressed by Annie and Pierre call into question the notion of bilingual identity, as understood as a simple step to assimilation.

Before talking specifically about the ethnographic study and its results, I would like, first, to discuss the theoretical foundations that I used in the conceptualization of the study. Second, I will situate the social and school context in which the inquiry took place.

2. Identity and *rapport* to language: a social construction

My analysis is based on an understanding of the notion of identity and its diverse representations as being socially constructed, where belonging to a specific ethnic group is interpreted as being narrowly linked to social practices (Breton, 1968, 1994; Barth, 1969; Juteau 1994; Juteau, 1999; Cardinal, 1994; Gérin-Lajoie, 2000)¹. I also agree that the way an individual relates to language will

¹ In the present analysis, I borrow from Juteau (1999) that claims that all groups are ethnic, independently of their location in the power structure.

have a direct impact on the way this same individual will identify with a specific ethnic group. Finally, I acknowledge the central role played by language in the process of identity construction (Heller, 1994).

In the case of the adolescents who participated in my ethnographic study, the way that they define themselves in relation to identity and language has definite consequences on their interpretation of the world in which they live, as well as on the position they choose to occupy in the group where they belong - position that might evolve, even change depending upon the circumstances. Such a process can, indeed, demonstrate a considerable complexity. One can witness movement (*mouvance*) in regards to language practices and sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group. By this, I mean the back and forth process that takes place in language use particularly between groups using French, English and other languages, impacts at the collective level not only on the in-group power relations, but also on the type of relations established with other social groups.

The phenomenon of *mouvance*, or this back and forth process experienced by people in society, will influence, at the individual level, their identity path (*parcours identitaire*), due to the fact that it calls individuals to position themselves in regards to their social and linguistic practices. However, it is also essential to recognize other elements that impact on the identity path of social actors. We must take into account that factors such as social class, gender, race, etc. when examining the process of identity construction, in order to avoid looking at the issue with a reductionist eye. As a well-known Francophone sociologist Danièle Juteau (1994) has explained "... although minorities share common characteristics, namely the way they relate to the majority group, it would be a mistake to ignore the existence of categories specific to minorities, highlighting the diversity and specificity of hierarchical social modes that pertain to these groups" (p. 73 - my own translation).

All factors taken into consideration, it becomes almost impossible to ignore this phenomenon of *mouvance* that characterizes social relations and comes to influence the group's social, linguistic and cultural practices. These dialectical social relations prove themselves to be highly complex and take place mostly through our daily language practices. I conclude that this *rapport* to identity and language cannot be examined outside of the social context in which it evolves, due to the fact that it is this same social context that gives it its meaning (Barth, 1969; Juteau, 1999).

2. French-language minority education in Canada - the case of Ontario

Across Canada, most Francophones live in the province of Québec and most Anglophones live in the other nine Canadian provinces and three territories. However, close to one million Francophones live outside of Québec. Of these, 500,000 live in the province of Ontario, where my study took place. Francophones living in Canada, outside of Québec, as an official language minority, have educational linguistic rights, as specified in Article 23 of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, which guarantees children to be educated in the language of the official minority. This right pertains as follows: 1) citizens of Canada (a) whose first language learned and still understood is that of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province in which they reside, or (b) who have received their primary school instruction in Canada in English or French and reside in a province where the language in which they received that instruction is the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province, have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language in that province; (2) citizens of Canada of whom any child has received or is receiving primary or secondary school instruction in English or French in Canada, have the right to have all their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the same language; (3) the right of citizens of Canada under subsections (1) and (2) to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of a province (a) applies wherever in the province the number of children of citizens who have such a right is sufficient to warrant the provision to them out of public funds of minority language instruction; and (b) includes, where the number of those children so warrants, the right to have them receive that instruction in minority language educational facilities provided out of public funds.

For those students who do not fall under the Article 23, there is also the possibility to enroll in the French language school system through the intermediary of a school board admission committee. These students are Anglophone Canadians and new immigrants or refugees that do not have Canadian citizenship.

Ontario counts more than 400 French language minority schools, at the elementary and secondary levels, where the language of instruction is French, as a first language. All courses are then taught in French, at the exception of the English as-a-second-language class. These are not what is called in Canada “French immersion schools”². The student population in the French language minority schools is, however, diversified in its capacity to communicate in French. Some of the students speak French fluently, but others have little and, in some cases, no knowledge of the language when they start school. Even for those who speak French fluently, a certain number prefer English to French as their language-in-use. The linguistic heterogeneity in the schools can be explained by a large number of students from exogamous marriage families, where one parent is French-speaking and the other, English-speaking³. Even in families where both parents are Francophone, in some instances, the language-in-use within the family is English (Cardinal et al., 1988). This category of Canadian students consists in fact of two sub-groups: the Franco-dominant students and the Anglo-dominant students (Mougeon, Heller, Canale and Béniak, 1984). In the case of the former group, student master French very well upon arrival at the French language school; furthermore, French is usually the home language. In the case of the latter group, students have a limited knowledge of French and in some cases, no knowledge at all; in addition they use English more frequently at home and during social activities. Students from ethnic minority groups in French language schools whose parents are not Canadian citizens usually have good skills in French, although it is sometimes their second or third language-in-use. Linguistic diversity is a fact in French language minority schools.

In addition to linguistic diversity, French language minority schools in Ontario face another difficult reality, that of being located in a social milieu predominantly Anglophone. This has a tremendous influence on the school life. The language practices that take place in the school reflect the duality of living continually in between two languages. Under these circumstances, language boundaries are easily crossed, and students go back and forth between French and English, depending upon the situation in which they are involved. My ethnographic study was conceptualized with this understanding and context in mind.

3. The ethnographic study “La représentation identitaire chez les jeunes francophones vivant en milieu minoritaire”⁴

The study had two main objectives. First, I wanted to understand how adolescents define themselves as members of a minority group, how they develop a sense of belonging to the group, how in fact these adolescents locate and position themselves in regards to their identity. In this context, particular attention was paid to the notion of bilingual identity. My second objective was to deconstruct the notion of bilingual identity in order a) to get a better understanding of its significance for the adolescents and, b) to examine if such a representation can exist in itself as a stable phenomenon, or if it represents a transitory state leading directly to total anglicisation and ultimately, to the assimilation to the Anglophone majority. The analysis focused on the language practices among these adolescents in the following settings: the family, the school, with friends and at work, when

² French immersion schools receive a *clientèle* of Anglophone students and are run by the Anglophone school boards. French language minority schools are run by the Francophone school boards and admit Francophone students or students from a Francophone heritage.

³ In that case, the Anglophone parent is most often unilingual and the Francophone parent bilingual. The language used in the home is usually English.

⁴ This program of study (1997-2000) was sponsored by the Social and Science Humanities Research Council of Canada. I would like to thank my research assistants Sylvie Roy, Marquis Bureau, Amal Maddibo, Douglas Gosse and Helen Faulkner, as well as Roselyne Roy who transcribed the entire set of interviews.

students were working on a part time basis. Although an ethnographic approach was used in this study, a survey was administered at the beginning of the 3-year program of research in order, on one hand, to gather demographic data on French minority high school students in general, and on the other hand, to select ten adolescents in the sample to participate in the ethnographic study from which ten identity portraits - *portraits identitaires* - were drawn.

3.1 Research methodology

The program of research had both quantitative and qualitative components. At the beginning of the study, we relied on quantitative research in the form of a survey administered to Grade 10 and 11 students attending two French language high schools, one located in the Toronto metropolitan area, which is in the South of the province and constitutes an area where Francophones are a small minority and where anglicization is at its highest level. The other high school was located in Eastern Ontario, where Francophones are less of a minority and where anglicization is less prominent, although the Anglophone influence is becoming more and more present in Francophones' lives. Survey responses were obtained from 459 students. A total of 158 questionnaires were used for this analysis⁵. The survey had three objectives: 1) to obtain factual information on students' linguistic habits in their daily activities, 2) to obtain biographical information on the students in order to present a profile of the population under study and, 3) to select a sample of students - ten, with five in each school - to continue with the qualitative phase of the study which was the basis for the construction of students' identity portraits - *portraits identitaires* at the end of the three-year study⁶. The selection of the students was based on the following criteria: a) five students in each school; b) an equal number of males and females; c) at least one of the parents having French as the mother tongue; d) preference given to students with siblings and; e) the responses given to one question asking the students who they perceived themselves - as francophone, anglophone, bilingual or trilingual.

The qualitative component was an ethnographic study. Three research techniques were used: observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. A total of six weeks of data took place during the three-year program of research. The selected students were observed mainly in the classroom, but also in the cafeteria, the halls and where extra-curricular activities took place, for a total of 100 days of observations. Semi-structured interviews were performed with the selected students twice a year for the duration of the study. Interviews were also performed with their parents, their siblings, their friends and their teachers, for a total of 115 semi-structured interviews. Schools documents were analyzed in order to provide a better understanding of the functioning of the schools. Finally, a week-end long meeting was organized during the last year of the study to allow the students from the two regions of the province to meet and to discuss collectively the issues of identity, language and culture. It also gave the students the opportunity to reflect on the research process and express their views on their participation in this multi-year study.

With the information provided on the conceptual framework of the study, it is now possible to begin the analysis. I will start with the identity portraits of Pierre and Annie. I choose to discuss these two particular students because of the significant differences between the two in regards to their *rappport* to the French language and culture, as well as their sense of belonging to the *francophonie* in general.

⁵ While survey responses were obtained from 459 students, parent consent forms were missing from 301 of the returned surveys and could not be used in the analysis.

⁶ Although the study began with ten students, two of them left the project during its second year. One of them decided to withdraw from the study and the other one moved away, outside of Ontario. The remaining eight students stayed for the duration of the study.

3.2 Pierre

Pierre was in Grade 10 at École publique Vigneault in the Ottawa region, when the study began in 1997. He was born and has lived in the Ottawa region all his life. He has always attended the French language school system. He lives with his mother, an Anglophone from Montréal, and his father, a Francophone from Ottawa and a younger sister. In the survey administered in the Fall 1997, he declared himself as being bilingual, with English as his dominant language.

His father, Claude, was raised in a Francophone milieu, went to French language schools (elementary, secondary and post-secondary). He is a professional photographer and owns a small business, with a few full time employees and occasionals who work part-time depending upon the demand. Claude considers himself as bilingual. He said in his interview that he was proud of having the capacity to be able to speak French and that he encourages his children to keep French alive, but that at the same time, he does not judge people on the basis of the language they speak. Pierre's grandparents on his father's side speak mostly in French when they visit, although English is used in some instances. Claude's parents are bilingual and they do not mind using English when members of the family gather together. For Claude, French has a sentimental value and constitutes an heritage to transmit to next generations, although he emphasizes its market value in terms of job prospects, as well. Pierre's mother, Clara is Anglophone, born and raised in Montréal. She studied in English. Being interested in learning languages, she took lessons in French, Spanish and German. In her early 20's, she moved to Ottawa when she married Claude. They met as cadets in the Canadian Armed Forces. Initially, Clara thought that Claude was Anglophone, because he would speak only in English when they first began to talk to each other. This is the way that she describes the situation:

One day, he began to talk to me about his brothers Louis and François. So, I told him 'how come they have French names?'
At that moment, I learned that he was Francophone.
(Int. Parents 2 - 3, DGL, 1A, p. 15)⁷

Clara holds a full time administrative position in the Federal government. She declares that she is a bilingual Anglophone, feeling more like an Ontarian than a Québécoise. She explains that French is important because knowledge of French allows a person to communicate with a greater number of people, most importantly, it opens the door to a wider labor market. From Clara's point of view, in the Canadian federal capital, it is important to be able to communicate in both official languages. In this context, French is understood as a commodity by both Pierre's parents. For them, French is first a mean of communication. As Clara explains in her interview:

Let's say that for me, it is very important to be able to speak French, especially for the kids. They will need it to get a job if they go to live in Québec or in Eastern Ontario, they will surely need French ...
(Int. Parents 2 - 3, DGL, 1A, p. 20)

Pierre's young sister, Nancy, was 13 years old when the research began. She was in Grade 7 in a French language minority school. Without hesitating, Nancy mentions that she considers herself bilingual with English as her dominant language. For her, knowing the two official languages is for its value market only. She adds that she speaks mostly English with her friends at school and outside the school. She continues to say that when she plays sports she uses English. The teams that she plays on are English speaking in most of the cases. At home she listens to English music and watches English channels on television.

The home language varies. Pierre and Nancy speak mostly English with their mother, mostly French with their father and when they talk to each other, the sister and brother use mostly English, although Pierre claims that he speaks both languages with his sister. Family activities take place, for the most part, in English.

It was noticed during the observations that took place over the three years of the study that Pierre

⁷ All interview excerpts have been translated from French to English.

did not appear that interested in school. His results were average and he seemed to take a rather passive attitude in class, working by himself most of the time, listening to music on his portable cassette player. Pierre's teachers regard him as more Anglophone than Francophone, in terms of his linguistic *appartenance*. In their opinion, the adolescent uses mostly English in his daily activities, especially with the other students. The majority of his friends use English as their preferred language even though many of them go to the same French language high school as Pierre does⁸. Pierre's social activities consist of going to parties, going downtown Ottawa, playing pool and visiting with friends. Pierre has a part-time job in a fast-food restaurant, where he occasionally uses French with some customers. Pierre reported that he felt more comfortable using English than French in all spheres of his life.

In Pierre's discourse, little attention is paid to the importance of the French language and culture in his life, or to a sense of belonging to the *francophonie*. This discourse stayed the same throughout the entire course of the study. Nonetheless, he considers himself bilingual and for him, the two languages are equal in importance and represent only a tool for communicating with others. The examples that Pierre gave us to illustrate his point were the following:

- . He uses French with teachers in school, because this is the rule; with his friends he prefers to use English.
- . While his extra-curricular activities take place in French, he works mostly in English and listens to Anglophone music.
- . At home, he uses English with his mother and French with his father. With his sister, he uses both languages and when the four of them are together, English will be the preferred language.

The last time we met with Pierre, he explained that he prefers to speak English over French. For him, French represents the language of the school, nothing more. Even in the school context, observations show that Pierre speaks only English with the other students. It is also interesting to note that even though Pierre told us in the first year of the study that he was using French at home, he did not mention anything of that sort when we did the last interview in the last year of the study. His constant use of English contradicts his discourse on the importance of both languages as tools of communication.

Finally, contrary to the other adolescents that participated in the ethnographic study, Pierre showed little interest in discussing issues pertaining to identity, language and culture. His answers were always very short.

For Pierre's father, French is understood more as a tradition, almost as folklore, than as a daily working language embedded in historical, social and cultural practices. In this context, French is not understood as a manifestation of Francophones' rights and as a symbol of belonging to a specific ethnic group, sharing with members of the group a strong sense of collectivity. The data suggest that the market value of French is the most important consideration for Pierre's parents.

3.3 Annie

In 1997 when the study began, Annie was in Grade 10 at École Catholique St-Laurent in the Toronto region. Born in Ottawa, she moved to Toronto when she was 3 years old. She lives with both of her Francophone parents, Michelle and Normand. She has two older brothers that have left home to pursue a university degree at a bilingual university in Ontario, the University of Ottawa. In the survey, Annie stated that she was bilingual, with French as her dominant language.

Michelle and Normand were both born in Québec, but moved to an Eastern town in Ontario when

⁸ We were not able to interview Pierre's friends, as in the case of the other participants. He told us that his friends did not want to be interviewed.

they were young children. In Annie's family, French has always been the language in use. Michelle still considers herself as a Québécoise, despite the fact that she has lived in Ontario since she was a child. As Annie's mother explains:

This is a question of belonging ... My sister and I always took our summer vacation in the Laurentides (north of Montréal) when we were kids. Even though I was living in Ontario, we always spent our vacations in the Laurentides. That way, we would go back to our Québécois roots.

(Int. Parents 7, DGL & SR, 1B, p. 7)

Michelle did all of her schooling in French and became a teacher. She earned her teaching certificate from the University of Ottawa, where she took all of her courses in French. She began her career in the French language school system in Ottawa. When the family moved to Toronto, she went to teach French immersion in the English school system, and she still does. Normand's parents, Annie's paternal grand-parents, were Franco-Ontarians, although Normand was born in Québec. He moved to Ontario when he was two months old. However, Normand went to French language minority schools. In Normand's home, both French and English were used. After a few years, Normand's parents moved their family to a French language parish where Normand's father insisted on living in French. Normand pursued his studies in French at the University of Ottawa and became a teacher in the French language Catholic school system. Since then, he has held administrative positions in a school board in the Toronto region. Annie has two older brothers, Jean-Laurent and François, who attended French language schools. Both of them are in their early twenties. They were very involved in school and extra curricular activities, and always played a leadership role, especially in high school. For them, French language and culture are a way of life, not just a folkloric notion. For Annie's parents, it is essential for them to live as Francophones in Toronto. Both parents work in French, and they try as much as they can to take part in activities in French, such as going to the theater, to the movies, etc ... whenever an activity is available in French. The three children were also involved in activities in French when they were younger: scouts, theater, piano lessons given by a Francophone teacher, summer camps in Québec, etc ... However, some activities were taken in English when they were not available in French, such as the ballet lessons that Annie has taken since she was very young. Both parents insist on the importance of the French language and culture in their lives. They are proud to be Francophones.

In high school, Annie was taking Advanced level courses and she performs well. She has always attended French language schools and she is very involved in all sorts of extra-curricular activities at school, such as the student council, theater and sports. She mentioned that for her, extra-curricular activities in French are most important. Her teachers perceive Annie as being highly conscious of the importance of the French language and culture as a way of life, and of the rights of the Francophones living outside of Québec. However, her level of consciousness does not preclude Annie from using English with the other students at school and outside of the school context. In one of her interviews, she mentioned that her friends do not like to speak French much, because it is not "cool" to do so and that, under these circumstances, she switches to English. She acknowledges that it is difficult sometimes to live in a context of linguistic duality:

I hear it everywhere (English language), on the street and then, you come to the school door and you are supposed to switch automatically to French, which makes life complicated. Sometimes, you get all confused, you say words in French, more like *français*. This is a difficult situation for me as a Francophone.

(Int. 2, student 7, DGL, 1B, p. 4)

Her group of friends are mostly from the school. They speak French and English and, in some cases, a third language. Five of them participated in a group interview. All of them stressed the importance of speaking French, even though they tend to speak more in English in their exchanges among themselves. Several of them live in families where French is not the language in use. They all

consider themselves bilingual, with English as their dominant language, and some of them claim to be trilingual. Their group activities consist of going shopping, to the movies and to the beach in the summer time. They revealed that sometimes they use French as a “secret code”, when they are together in a public place and when they do not want to be understood by people around them. They may then switch to French.

Annie knows that she is different from most of her friends in regards to the place of the French language and culture in her life:

I am completely different from the others. This (French) is part of my culture, which I want to preserve. I find it insulting when some people insult my language, because they are not only insulting my language, this is me that they are insulting ... I go to see theater performances in French, I try to incorporate as much French as I can in my life. For sure, with my friends, I am in a minority situation, so English wins. But sometimes, when I begin to speak in French, my friends speak it too, even though it lasts for a minute or two (laughs) ...
(Int., friends, DGL & SR, 3B, p. 17-18)

For Annie, as for her parents, activities in French are important in her life. For example, she got seriously involved in theater during the study and she was a member of a semi-professional theater group that performs in French in Toronto and at theater festivals in Europe. To live in French is very present in Annie’s life. She has a strong sense of belonging to the *francophonie*. From her point of view, without a strong sense of belonging, a language and a culture cannot survive over time. It is mostly within her family that she was taught the importance of developing this sense of belonging, from her parents first, but also from her brothers. She acknowledges, however, that English is a constant part of her life and that it is easy to slip into the habit of using it. Under these circumstances, English represents only a language of communication for her. Her practical knowledge of English is the reason why she defines herself as bilingual. During the last interview, Annie mentioned that her participation in the study had made her realize even more the importance of strong ties to the French language and culture in minority settings. She states that is important to make it a way of life in as many spheres of activities as possible.

From the observation and interview data, there is no doubt that Annie understands what is at stake for Francophones living in a minority setting. Her own stand on the importance of living in French demonstrates that she is conscious of how fragile it is to maintain the vitality of the language and culture. She is also conscious that she is constantly living on linguistic and cultural boundaries and that it is sometimes difficult to keep a balance. In Annie’s case, her family is instrumental in the way that she makes sense of what it means being Francophone in a complex dominant Anglophone environment. For Annie, French is a language of action not a language of folklore, which brings her to constantly reposition herself in terms of the place occupied by French and English in her life.

4. The complexity of the notion of bilingual identity

The findings reflected in these complex identity portraits of Pierre and Annie echo those of most of the students who participated in the study (Gérin-Lajoie, 2001, 2003). All but one of these students declared themselves as having a bilingual identity, with either French or English as their dominant language. Furthermore, in the discourse associated with each student, being bilingual did not preclude of having some definite *rapport* with the *francophonie* and understanding what is at stake for Francophones who live in minority settings in Canada.

The results of the survey also revealed that most of the adolescents of Grades 10 and 11 of both high schools that answered the questionnaire claim a bilingual identity - 89.7 % at École catholique St-Laurent and 83 % at École publique Vigneault. This is consistent with findings from prior large-scale quantitative studies (Bernard, 1990, 1998; Boissonneault, 1996). In 1998, a Franco-Ontarian sociologist from the University of Ottawa, the late Roger Bernard, expressed his point of view on bilingual identity in the following way:

The extent of the phenomenon demonstrates that a double linguistic status is taking form and that it is not anymore a marginal reality. This bilinguality is part of the Ontarian *francophonie*. This is not about a community dualism, but a new form of individual bilingualism and biculturalism inside the Canadian *francophonie*. (p. 82)

From Bernard's point of view, this would represent a new reality. However, in Bernard's analysis this new state would take a negative turn that would lead in most of the cases to the assimilation to the Anglophone majority. My results, quantitative as well as qualitative, on the large number of adolescents declaring a bilingual identity are in line with Bernard's findings, as well with other authors such as Castonguay (1999). However, contrary to the interpretation of the quantitative studies, findings from my ethnographic study reveal the notion of bilingual identity to be more complex than the way it is usually explained. I strongly believe that the assimilationist conclusions drawn from prior quantitative studies are premature and appear to be at the same time determinist, alarmist and defeatist.

No one can deny the fact that linguistic boundaries are more and more difficult to delimit in Francophone minority settings, nor that the influence of the Anglophone majority is putting enormous pressure on Francophones outside of Québec to keep their language and culture alive. In the cases of Annie and Pierre, who both claim a bilingual identity, their discourse on the issue of identity, language and culture is quite different. Annie, on one hand, demonstrates a high level of consciousness regarding the importance of French language and culture and a strong sense of belonging to the *francophonie* that lives outside of Québec. As she expressed in one of her interviews:

I say that I am bilingual because I live in an Anglophone environment, and I know the language. But here (pointing to her head), I am Francophone. The French language will take the first place in my life, not the English language. (Meeting in Toronto, October 1999, p. 55)

Pierre, on the other hand, demonstrates a high level of anglicisation, which could easily lead to the assimilation to the Anglophone majority. For him, the use of French is mostly practical and imposed on him by the school setting. One can notice a strong sense of belonging to the Anglophone majority. He admitted that sometimes he speaks French because he goes to a French language school, but that there is nothing more to it. His discourse lacks of a sense of awareness on the issues at stake for the Canadian *francophonie*.

However, both Annie and Pierre claim to have a bilingual identity. What the ethnographic study reveals through these and the other six identity portraits is that identity paths are neither static, nor linear and consist of moving back and forth between two, in some instances, three linguistic boundaries. The symbolic reality of these adolescents as well as their daily experiences with linguistic boundaries vary greatly. To position oneself as bilingual might mean different things to different people, but it does not necessarily result in a complete rejection of French language and of a sense of belonging to the *francophonie*. The daily experiences of the participants and their discourse on the issue of identity make us realize that we are in presence of diversified identity paths, from ones of convinced Francophones, as in Annie's case, to ones of converted Anglophones, as in Pierre's case. For those participants who demonstrated a firm conviction concerning the need to enhance French language and culture, and Annie is part of that group, the analysis brought us to examine specifically the role of their parents and their friends in this process. The results indicate that the family plays a significant role in the way these adolescents establish their *rapport* to the French language and culture. In those families where French language represents more than a simple commodity and is a way of life on a daily basis, as in the example of Annie's family, children tend to demonstrate a higher level of consciousness regarding the importance for Francophones to exercise their rights and to take an active role as members of the *francophonie*.

Although the influence of the family is seen by different authors as being crucial in the younger years (Juteau, 1999; Allaire and Fedignan, 1993), it is my opinion that this influence goes beyond

childhood. This role remains crucial in the way that individual identity evolves during adolescence, although I recognize that the process of socialization is more intense in younger children. In instances, for example, where French is used on a daily basis within the family, the discourse of the adolescents emphasizes the importance of the French language and culture and to developing also a strong sense of belonging (*sens d'appartenance*). However, in families where the parents see being able to speak French more as a commodity, as in the case of Pierre's parents, there is very little cultural or symbolic value given to the language. As expressed by Clara, Pierre's mother:

For me, French language has an important place in my life and in my children's life. I have always worked in a bilingual environment, or even in an environment rather French. I suppose that if the kids stay here (in Ottawa), they will be in the same position ... They will have more opportunities in finding good jobs.

(Int. Parents 2 - 3, DGL, 1A, p. 20)

It is important to mention that the notion of commodity was part of the discourse for the majority of the participants, as well as their parents and friends. However, in the families where, in addition to that, we could find a real awareness towards issues pertaining to the *francophonie*, the adolescents talk about the French language and culture as a way of life.

Their friends have also a major influence on the way these adolescents relate to the French minority language and culture. They play a substantial role in the process of identity construction and contribute to a certain extent to the phenomenon of anglicisation that can be noticed among young Francophones nowadays. It is a fact that most of the participants' activities with their friends are conducted in English, because of a lack of activities in French in the two regions of the province, which, interestingly enough, was noticed by more than one participant. Consequently, the language in use is often English. As one friend explains:

When we go to dances, the music is in English. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of us express ourselves easier in English is due to the fact that we live in an Anglophone city. So, when we go out, we talk English, which makes it easier.

(Ent. friends 8, DGL & SR, 1B, p. 13)

Contrary to popular belief, the anglicisation within the group of friends is not a new phenomenon. Previous studies have shown consistently that the preferred language between friends within the French language minority schools is often English. In addition, most of the activities undertaken by the group of friends outside of the school take place in English (Heller, 1987, 1999; Hébert and Grenier, 1993; Gérin-Lajoie, 1995).

A few participants told us that it is more "cool" to speak English than French. Even when the group is composed of only Francophones, sometimes the adolescents will still interact in English. Participants and friends have also indicated that the use of a specific language will depend upon the situation in which the verbal exchange takes place. For example, it seems that the language used is determined, most of the time, by the individual who begins the conversation; if that person uses English, the other will continue using the same language. In that sense, the language choice becomes circumstantial (Breton, 1994).

Nevertheless, many of these friends emphasize the importance of the French language and culture. For those young people, the frequent use of the English language does not mean a total absence of social consciousness regarding their identity as members of a minority language community.

4. Conclusion

To illustrate the notion of bilingual identity, I have presented the cases of Pierre et Annie, who both claim a bilingual identity, but whose discourses differ greatly in regards to their *rappport* to the subordinate language - French, and to the notion of identity in general. The contrasting views expressed by Annie and Pierre lead us question the notion of bilingual identity, when conceived as a simple step to assimilation. This perspective is often associated with quantitative research on language use and identity, where numbers often limit a deeper examination of the process of identity construction. The results of the ethnographic study presented here tend to show that, on the contrary, some of these adolescents, like Annie, possess a deep sense of belonging to the minority group. Other participants in the study demonstrated similar level of consciousness towards the *francophonie*.

The results also demonstrate that the *rappport* to identity is far from being static. For example, one participant from Toronto, named Phillias, after having declared a bilingual identity with French as the dominant language, came to question his *rappport* to French language and culture. He tried to understand why he was living so much as an Anglophone on a daily basis. His reflection brought him to redefine his position in terms of his own identity.

How individuals position themselves in terms of what groups they belong to will depend upon the structural power relations in which they evolve, and language practices are significantly influenced by the social reality in which they take place. The social reality in Canada outside of Québec is, for its part, founded on unequal social relations, where English is the dominant language, the language of power. The way that people position themselves in terms of their own sense of belonging will have an impact at two levels: first, on their own individual identity path and, at the same time, on the making of the collective identity for Francophones who live in minority settings. As we said before, the *rappport* to language and culture constitutes a phenomenon constantly changing -*en mouvance*- which is influenced by multiple social factors, in several social contexts. In the present study, I examined the influence of the family and friends on how our participants made sense of their *rappport* to language and culture, their sense of belonging and their identity in general.

Canadian adolescents living in Francophone minority settings are strongly influenced by the values put forward by the Anglophone majority. Consequently, they find themselves at the centre of complex dialectical social relations, a situation sometimes difficult for them to make sense of. For example, when these young people get to their school, the expectation is that they will act as Francophones, when a few minutes before, they were interacting in English when they were walking to school, or on the bus talking about a movie they saw in English the night before or about the last CD of their favorite American music group.

As illustrated, the concept of bilingual identity needs to be understood as a fluid notion which cannot be analyzed in a mechanistic way. The identity paths that were examined in the context of the present study demonstrate clearly some *mouvance* when we examine the notion of identity. In fact, the identity process is always in movement, constructing and reconstructing oneself. Consequently, this phenomenon has a profound impact on the individuals' identity path. This is within such a context that the reality of the Francophone minority and the future of the *francophonie* should be analyzed.

This does not mean however that the danger of assimilation to the Anglophone majority has been eliminated through this type of analysis. To define oneself as being bilingual can effectively indicate a net preference for the English language and culture and eventually lead to a total rejection of the *francophonie*. However, and that was the purpose of this article, it is essential to recognize the complexity of the social practices that take place in the Francophone minority milieu. This is why it is essential to bring *some nuance* to some research results, in order to be able to give a more realistic view of the existing situation. This is also why social practices must be examined in their daily manifestations, taking into account the surrounding context. In my opinion, more empirical studies conducted within the qualitative research paradigm are needed to reach a better understanding of how identity is socially constructed and how people make sense of this notion and how it gets translated in their discourse as well as in their daily lives.

Finally, I would like to point out that even though the results presented in the present article are about an official minority in Canada, it is possible to extend the analysis to other minority groups, who live similar experiences in terms of their *rappport* to home language and culture and which have learned to live on and across very distinct language boundaries.

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